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NFAC 3386-81

3 June 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: DD/NFA

SUBJECT: Senior Review Panel Proposal for an Interagency Paper on the Intra-Regional Military Balance in the Central America-Caribbean Region, 1981-85

1. The Panel suggests a clear and present need for an interagency study of the military balance within the Central American-Caribbean region projected through 1985. We think the absence of such a paper represents a serious estimative gap.

2. The study could be either an NIE or an IIM. Because of the region's traditional and continuing strategic, political and psychological importance to the US, we think an NIE is more appropriate. The matter is too important--and has too many political and economic ramifications--to leave solely to DOD/DIA.

3. The central aim of the paper would be to identify and assess the current and developing centers of military power within the region and evaluate their capabilities to: (a) project their influence within the region, now and through 1985, and (b) use military power in ways inimical to US interests during that time frame. An evaluation of the forces and capabilities of each country in the region is inherent in the study.

4. The purposes of the paper would be to (a) inform and alert US policymakers to the comprehensive and coordinated nature of potential military threats to the United States and the West now present and developing in the area; and (b) generate the required analytic and collection resources, establish a new priority of effort needed to keep the estimate current after publication, and avoid the lengthy gaps in our intelligence coverage of the area that have occurred in the past.

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5. A major focus of the paper would be Cuba since it is the major indigenous power center in the region. In assessing Cuban capabilities, now and in 1985, several different aspects must be addressed:

a. Cuba's basic capability to defend the island; this entails the production of a comprehensive Cuban order of battle as well as an assessment of the combat effectiveness of Cuban forces.

b. Cuban capabilities to project power in the region; with their own integral forces, and with Soviet assistance.

c. The effect on Cuban capabilities in the Central America-Caribbean region of the existence and deployment of Cuban expeditionary proxy forces in Africa and the Middle East.

d. The use of Cuba by the Soviets as a major base--air fields, naval bases, communications and intercept sites, and the like--and the implications for the US of this Soviet presence. In a war with the Soviet Union, for example, or under conditions of severely heightened tension, the US could not afford to ignore the problem and would have to take steps to deny the use of the island as a Soviet base.

e. The indispensability of the Soviet role in providing the military materiel and assistance required by Cuban forces.

6. Another principal focus would be on Nicaragua as an emerging power center which, as a third generation surrogate, potentially might seek to dominate Central America. The Soviet/Cuban role in fostering and supporting the Sandinista and other revolutionary movements in Central America should be an integral part of the assessment.

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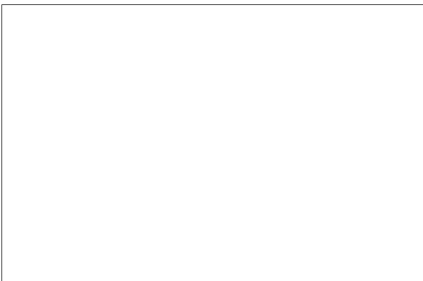

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7. The concluding parts of the study should evaluate the vulnerabilities of the principal power centers and address the implications of the developing military situation in the region for the US now and through 1985.

8. In order to minimize the contentious net assessment issue, the study probably should not attempt to assess the impact of any US military presence in the area on the indigenous military balance, but for the most part address only indigenous forces. The estimate should, however, take into account both the proximity of US bases and forces to the region as an inhibition against the employment of local forces and the possible interposition of Soviet combat forces in the region.

9. The new Administration has been reviewing the situation in the region and is seeking to develop a cohesive US policy towards Cuba and the larger Caribbean region. This policy development process will no doubt be a continuing one. We believe an NIE along lines indicated above would be a major input to this policy.

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William Leonhart  


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cc: C/NIC  
NIO/LA

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